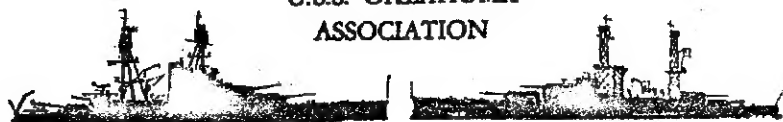


U.S.S. OKLAHOMA ASSOCIATION



HISTORIAN
Gerald E. Foreman
S. R. 1, Box 1314
Fort Tobacco, Md. 20677

CONTRIBUTORS

*
Nobel W. Abrahams
John A. Bauer
William L. Benson
Howard W. Bonheimer
James C. Bounds
Jackson P. Centers
George A. DeLong
John T. Dowd
Edward H. Elliottson
John J. Foran
Gerald E. Foreman
John W. Gerecht
Harry Gokstad
Donald S. Gray
Richard E. Grimes
Charles F. Grisham
Woodrow W. Harcus
Carl A. Holmquist
Emmanuel Hirschberg
William C. Humphrey
Joseph Hydniska
Ray W. Inlow
Bernard Kolisch
Lyle O. Kirk
Leon C. Kolb
Edgar R. Koons
Viggo E. Kornis
William A. LaRue
Everett L. Lawrence
John A. Lemanski
John S. Letcher
Ralph F. B. Moore
John S. McCain, Jr.
Walter W. Olson, Sr.
Delbert J. Patrick
Lloyd Payne
William F. Petrovic
Richard E. Reed
Eugene M. Richtmyer
Glen H. Robinson
Harold S. Roiland
Herbert F. Rommel
Everett A. Sanderson
Warren S. Seely
Edward O. Smith
Lee B. Steele
Michael F. Torker
John R. Thomas
Manson Turner
Frank Uhlig
William R. Vaiden
Joseph E. Vargo
Eugene H. Young
Stephen B. Young

HISTORY

An Interview With Some of
The Survivors of the OKLAHOMA
At the Annual Convention

32 Came Back!

DeLong's Narrative, As Told To
G.E. Foreman, Historian of the

USS OKLAHOMA ASSOCIATION, May 6

1973

Newport, Rhode I.

- FOREMAN:** There were at least two holes - two openings in the hull - one was here, and the other (yours) was further back - that is, Steering Aft.
- DELONG:** What was that little Radio Station just forward of us?
- FOREMAN:** That was Radio IV, sometimes called Emergency Radio.
- DELONG:** The Radiomen who were in there - I knew one of them - I communicated with one; but they were both killed, weren't they?
- FOREMAN:** No, they were cut out - altho quite some time before they got to you guys; but it wasn't TWO, it was SIX.
- STRONG:** - And they got out?
- FOREMAN:** Yes, Lucky Bag, Radio IV and D-25-M which was the Handling room for the Anti-Aircraft Battery....
- MORONEY:** There were Quartermasters in the Steering Engine Room.
- FOREMAN:** In fact, That was my Battle Station... These guys were all trapped there; but I would have stayed by choice because that was my battle Station. I was the Quartermaster-In-Charge, Steering Aft. The others would have tried to get to another battle station...
- DELONG:** There was that moment of panic when we first realized we were trapped; and a couple of us (I was one of them) almost did something very foolish. If I hadn't heard that armored hatch slam shut in the Carpenter

Shop, I might have tried to dive down to see if I could get thru. I looked down at the prospect, and then at the others - we looked at each other in stunned silence. It was a mind-numbing thing knowing that that was the only way out - and we KNEW it! Everything else was just solid steel around us, and if we were to make it on our own, that trunk was the only way. There wasn't any rope - had there been a line or something you could tie around your waist and then work your way back if you ran into trouble - - but just to swim down three decks, with the various doors closed in an upside down environment....

LUTENEGGER: Not being oriented....

DeLONG: We didn't do anything foolish, because with all the thots of being trapped in that passageway, we looked at it and said, "Naw! We'll just take our chances by staying right here!" We went back to the high level at that point and started fighting off the incoming water.

FOREMAN: How lucky you were to have remained.

DeLONG: The decisions we made - all eight of us - no one guy can claim; it was just a total democracy in the last hour.

FOREMAN: You know, I'm real proud of my thinking Quartermasters, by golly.

LUTENEGGER: How many HOURS was that?

DeLONG: I don't know. We had no idea of time. The thing was, the water was coming up over the bottom of that door and if we had waited a couple of hours (it was up like this, and getting higher) we wouldn't have been able to get the door open, once we had water up against it - it was down low enough in the compartment so that we'd never have been able to open it. We had to make a decision right then; we said, "OK, we got to decide now" and we did the right thing in that case. The other one was, there was one of these Man-hole covers, and when she turned over (it used to be on deck up along the side like this) well, we decided to leave THAT one closed; well, that's the one where they came thru the double-bottoms here, and out back to us there. The lights were still on below decks when she took her first list... I climbed up on my bunk stanchion and I remember seeing things at that point. I saw Bounds hanging on those Steering Wheels - the four big hand steering wheels. You put two men on each wheel to steer the ship... (Note: These were only used to shift method of steering - Ed.) .. and when the thing went over - I don't know if the coupling got engaged to the rudder or not; but it didn't matter, it would have gone any way it was free - all that weight on it. There was bounds, stretched out like he was on a rack, and he was going like Hell - and that's the last thing I saw. Bounds, right there (pointing to a photo) he was one of the

then we secured to higher ground again. We stayed there. We didn't dare go near the water. At that point the flashlight started going off. The only way you could get any light in the final hours was if you happened to touch it just right. There was a point that if you touched the bulb to the battery just right - it had to be loose now, you couldn't use that gadget anymore - just for a few seconds you could get it to light and have a look around the compartment. That's when we used that marker the binocular. (Laughter) One of the Compasses was down there - the Battle Compass with the two metal balls on the side. When she turned over, it wasn't hanging straight up and down - it was something of an angle. One of the guys cracked, "Let's check on the water - see if it's tickling the Navigator's balls!" (Laughter) I'll never forget that crack - I don't know who said it; but it set a tone that kept everybody on an even keel. I was amazed at the comparative calm we all had.

FOREMAN: Bounds was the one who had his thumb caught under a locker.

DeLONG: And they tried to lift those lockers up; but he reached under there with one hand and got his thumb out. It took two guys to move those lockers the day before. He told us about that later, he said, "I don't know where the hell I got all that strength - but boy! I had to get rid of that!" I think Bounds was the first one out.... We had decided among ourselves earlier, and when they called down, "Is there anyone hurt? Any wounded should come out first!" Well he was the nearest thing we had to a wounded man.

FOREMAN: But DeCastro had mentioned in his account that there were two wounded men in there, one with a broken finger, and the other with a broken arm.....

DeLONG: That could have been, but I don't remember....

FOREMAN: Someone asked me, could it have been Jones? Can you recall anything about Jones?

DeLONG: No. Now in looking back, Jones came over to the Helena with us - maybe he DID have a bandaged arm - I'm not sure; I can't swear to it.

FOREMAN: Neither can I! (!?!?!)

DeLONG: I wonder if he couldn't have gotten that later, tho.... he was on the Helena walking around with his arm in a sling - they may have associated it with

FOREMAN: But DeCastro wouldn't have known about that!

DeLONG: That's right! He wouldn't.... We all had scratches on our backs, tho we were all in good condition, when they took us out thru that hole. They used these chipping

eight. I climbed up on the bunk stanchion - it was about that big - I've forgotten if there were two or three bunks anymore - Hell, I headed for my bunk - I don't know why - I guess I thot it was a good safe place to be! Those damned engines! Dutch, you know those spare engine parts that we used to think were so secure when the ship was operating? When it rolled over, they fell right out of their blocks - now I'm talking about TONS of machinery. The stuff came crashing down at our feet, and I thot "Holy gee! I better get out of here!" and just about that time - the reason I asked about that bar-bell set - the darned thing fell over - whoever used it didn't have any of the weights on it - it was like a javelin! It came at me - it hung on, and then all of a sudden I saw the damned thing coming toward me. I don't know where it came from. I was hanging on and did not want to let go. Well, that damned thing hit me right across my leg here, and my shin here, and I only had a scuff mark - that's all. If that damned thing had've knocked me off, I would've fallen right down among the machinery. When it ended up, I was almost upside down - I was headed down instead of up - and all I did was stay there...(laughter)... and with Bounds on that damned wheel. I don't know where the other six men were....

LUTENEGER: How long did you have a flashlight down there?

DeLONG: I would say that HALF of the time we had SOME flashlight.

LUTENEGER: How about Battle Lanterns?

DeLONG: We didn't go near the water; because if you slid into that and started that darn stuff moving again, or even if you fell in among it, it would be disasterous, so we just stayed in that one spot. Basically, after we had the water stopped (you know flooding took place) most of it came in thru the air vent; and we finally had that stopped up with a mattress. First of all, we put all the clothing we could find down in there, but that didn't hold it - it would just blow it out like a broken fire hydrant. We had gotten blankets, and we went thru the lockers and got clothing as I said before; but the thing that finally did it was a bunk mattress. We took it and rolled it up and sorta used it as a cork - we put Beal on it - WE had been standing around holding it down - Beal was the heaviest - he finally said, "Hey, is there anything else to hold this down, the water is coming up on me!" At that point we took a piece of line that was laying there - I don't know where it came from - and lashed down an Acey-Deucey board on top. The Artley brothers had been playing Acey-Deucey the night before when I came back; you know, the kind with a checker board on one side - well, we took it to the Zed fitting and it fit exactly over it - just as tho it was made for it. We lashed the damn thing down with that line I told you about - we put an "X" over it using the electrical conduits and that sort of thing as an anchor. We made the critical "X" and then we secured to

chipping drills instead of acetylene torches. They were afraid they were going to burn the oil in the sides there. They only cut a hole big enough - I probably couldn't get thru now - (Laughter)

FOREMAN: There he is (pointing to the picture) he's really a thin, handsome kid - really built for going thru holes! (Laughter)

DeLONG: When they passed us up thru there, those ragged edges cut into us, but we were so numb we couldn't feel it. With all that oil and stuff on our backs, those ragged edges just put little tiger scratches - what you'd normally expect from passing a guy thru there. As a matter of fact, it didn't occur to me until I saw the others - but they didn't do anything about it - they just swatted it off. They weren't deep; we couldn't even claim a purple heart. (Laughter) They were sliding along the side, you know, and they put down these little foot-pads or something; that's how they did the Rescue operation. They tacked them on - oh Hell, just little things like this - sorta like perches. They went thru - into the double-bottoms and worked their way down lower by means of these little perches they had tacked on as they progressed, until they finally made it to the man-hole I spoke of. There was just a little pin-point of light up there which was our first indication they were out there - just a little nail-hole or something. When we first saw that pin-point of light thru that little hole - I didn't know why it was there, it certainly wasn't designed that way; just a little flaw or something. When we saw it, we KNEW they were out there; before this it had SOUNDED as if they were there a dozen times; but this was the first time that we actually knew. We then undogged the door, and it just stayed up there! I don't know if the rubber gasket was tight or whatever; but we had to PULL it and it popped - the air popped out. Then the water started up. What they were afraid of out there was that we would rush out too fast, so the first thing he said was, "Don't rush - stay right where you are!" They didn't know it, but we couldn't; because we had to get up there to get out. From his angle, I think he thought we were coming straight out and knock him off his perch and he'd drop down into the double-bottoms. "Don't do anything, we'll take care of you! Don't try to get out of there!" Then they reached down under our armpits and pulled us up one at a time and handed us up to the guy on the next perch. They kept telling us, "Don't do anything, don't struggle against us!"

FOREMAN: Were these yard workmen or Navy people?

DeLONG: They were a mixture of both.

FOREMAN: Were there any OKLAHOMA sailors?

DeLONG: Some you have identified. Now this Benson who was in

charge, this was the first I heard of it, but I don't think any were coming out yet (indicating the photo) from your description of the events. We were back here.. We were a lucky crew, we ended up with nothing but a pair of shorts. See this one here, for instance - he's walking across there and he's got WHITE shorts on... We didn't have white shorts - we just had underwear - all eight of us were stripped down.

FOREMAN: They had just come from shore and were starting to assist in the rescue.

DeLONG: That was our total possession - a pair of skivvie shorts!

FOREMAN: One of our other members, Joe Hydrusko came over from the Solace to assist in the rescue. Admiral Benson highly recommended Joe; he said that his action that day was heroic...

DeLONG: ANYBODY that was in the double-bottoms that day was heroic.

FOREMAN: We'll get together some day and have all the stories.

DeLONG: Those guys who identify themselves to you as having participated in the rescue - give them our regards; our personal thanks.

FOREMAN: Then I write up this "33 Meeting" for the History angle; I will collect all the stories I can and then return it to you. All this will be mentioned. I'll practically re-write the whole story and I think that will do a lot of good to tie it all together.

LUTENEGER: Any Quartermasters killed?

FOREMAN: Artley was the only one.

DeLONG: One out of 18. The statistics would have changed dramatically if it hadn't been for the one rescue of the eight of us - almost 50% would have been lost. As I remember, there was a tunnel from Central right up thru the mast.

FOREMAN: That was the tube, not the mast leg; the conning tower tube.

DeLONG: That was where Artley - Swede Artley's brother died.

FOREMAN: Mrs. Yarnall wrote me that Yarnall was Assistant Damage Control Officer whose battle station was Central, see? Ens. Yarnall and a couple of the men decided to go up the Conning Tower tube; but the others decided against it. They went the other way and were drowned. Why Artley didn't go up the tube is more than I can understand. He KNEW the tube, while the others probably didn't even know of it. The Officer might have known OF it; but even HE had probably never been in it before.

DeLONG: Had they gone up the tube before the ship went over, they would have gone right off into the water.

FOREMAN: Yes, and the Conning Tower hatch would have probably flopped open... even if they didn't beat the roll they more likely would have been saved... They would even have been headed downward for a while.

DeLONG: I'll be darned... If you could've hung on even when the water was rushing in you still could have gotten out; but plenty scared - I sure was.

FOREMAN: Brave but scared; there's plenty of evidence of that.

MORONEY: Me, I was scared, but only a little bit longer...

FOREMAN: How about Staff and Centers? It was 0230 on the 9th when they were freed...

MORONEY: Centers told me he didn't know HOW long he was under there.

DeLONG: It was less than 36 hours... we were there from 0200 in the morning until 1600 the next day, and we didn't know if it was several hours or several days. We went over to the Solace, and after the motor launch left the side, we crossed over the deck and met the Captain on the quarter-deck. He came over and said, "Get the brandy!" That was the first thing he said. They gave us a cigarette, but warned us not to throw it over the side as there was a lot of oil from the Arizona.... In the boat, all we got was a cup of water and a smoke. But on the Solace when they got the brandy - it was Ellis, I think - he wasn't sure he wanted it; so I said, "I'll take yours!" I took my 2nd shot, but when I started to go for the 3rd they said, "Uh, uh, it isn't good for your stomach!" Then we went below decks and got a meal. We were so damned tired and numb we could hardly see straight; and we still weren't exactly sure what had happened. Then they told us that the Japs had attacked us. Then we went to sleep. The next morning we were refreshed - no problem with sleep. But when we saw the wounded from the other ships... I tell you I saw one guy lying in a bunk there - they were all scurrying around trying to help these people - this guy was charred so bad there was a black scale on top. Another one was red - puffy - you KNEW that if you took your finger, it would go right down to the bone.

LUTENEGGER: We sent guys to the dispensary - the guys that got burnt so bad. 'Specially on Ford Island... my God! You should have saw some of those guys they brot in there. They were like you say, just charred.

DeLONG: It was a different reaction to different people. The kinds of burns were cooked, fried or charcoal broiled - that's what it amounted to. Others were pink and red. That's the only time I ever really felt anger. Later on I felt that the Jap didn't want to fight me any more

than I wanted to fight him. You couldn't understand why one group of men wanted to do that to another. Why couldn't it be, "Couldn't we just talk it over?" Another thing - and I can't praise the others without boasting a bit myself - and that is we came out of it fairly calm under the circumstances. At no time was there any shouting panic. There may have been, "Hey, get that water over there!" but that's not panic....

FOREMAN: Ya, that's what you'd call 'emphatic'....

DeLONG: It was more emphasis than panic.

MORONEY: No sobbin' and breakin' down... I'm too young to die! like you often hear about.

DeLONG: No, uh, uh. We were all thinking.

FOREMAN: In control - in control.

DeLONG: My first reaction - and I told my family this when I got home, you know, I was kinda footloose and fancy free. At 19 I didn't even have a steady girl-friend or anything; my only thots were of WOM.... all I could think of was my Mother crying. It didn't seem to bother me much about myself; it was surprising. I think it would be a whole lot harder for an older person to take this than a 19 year old who at that time was without ties and responsibilities. It didn't seem to matter too much; but "wasn't it awful to have to go so soon?" Lt. Ingram - Bill Ingram was over there on shore after we left the Solace and even before we had been assigned to the Helena yet. Well, he met us with open arms - he was greeting everybody. You've probably heard the stories about him...

FOREMAN: No, I didn't....

DeLONG: He was GREAT that day. Anybody that came ashore - he was looking for anybody that he recognized from the OKLAHOMA. He said, "Well fellows, you really have it made - you'll never have a problem again; you're living on borrowed time!" The line stuck and I used it in my article. He had said something that really struck home...

FOREMAN: I got Ingram's address.

MORONEY: He was on the San Juan - and later the Reynolds Aluminum Company...

DeLONG: His Dad was an Admiral....

LUTENEGER: I remember Bill Ingram when I was standing under the bridge, "Don't leave 'er, she ain't goin' over!"

STRONG: Did anyone from the engine-room get out?

FOREMAN: There were a lot of them from the Engine-rooms who got

out. Look, I have the complete muster of the OKLAHOMA, Navy, Marines - everything! All are in those folders over there... with an asterisk for those who lost their lives, all in alphabetical order so that you can tell at a glance. Of course, the Watertenders took a beating.

STRONG: The Watertenders?

FOREMAN: E Div. compartment was practically over the boilers and so they probably were among the first to their battle stations.

LUTENEGGER: How come the Signalmen got it, their compartment wasn't that far below. I can't figure out how come the signalmen got such a high casualty... Where was their battle stations?

FOREMAN: C Div. was forward. The Marines were aft by the 3rd division. The signalman's battle stations were all top side - but they could have literally run into one of those torpedoes while going to their battle stations.

DELONG: Some of the signalmen would have been back in Bat II because you always have to reproduce your bridge in some other place....

MORONEY: The Carpenter and the Exec were working on the hull... Some of them went over the side into the oil, and there was this Doctor... We were coming along in this motor whaleboat with Dr. Fadell... I reached over the side to grab him by the head, but my hand kept slipping off his bald head. Well there was this old hammock in the bottom of the boat, so I picked it up and put it around his neck and pulled him in! (Laughter) Then there was this Bos'n on the Maryland with an ax chopping the lines. This guy was climbing over the lines to the Maryland and as he reached the last foot or so he looked up at the Bos'n and said, "Boy, I made it!" Just then the Bos'n chopped the last strand and he went in to the water.

FOREMAN: The amazing thing to me is - you know these stories that have come out that her masts and superstructure stuck in the bottom and prevented her from rolling further? When they rolled her back over, her decks were CLEAN - there were no masts hanging on it - there was no bridge; nothing! And that's a fact!

MORONEY: The blisters were open for Admiral's Inspection on Monday and as soon as the water poured in...

STRONG: How's with all that superstructure - did they cut all that off?

FOREMAN: No it was CRUNCHED off! That is a fact. It is my studied opinion, and I've experimented - that if the OKLAHOMA had NOT been wide open for inspection, she

would have rolled over even FASTER....

LUTENECKER: What?

FOREMAN: Well think of it - the whole Port side torn off, and the whole starboard side watertight... Come on, think about it! She would have rolled fast. She had, in this instance, automatic counterflooding. The port side was ripped open and the water had free access to the starboard side. That's right, the doors were open on the other side, and if she had the efficient counterflooding of the West Virginia, she never would have rolled over. As it happened, she continued to roll when she lost stability because there was nothing to stop the water from running BACK out of the starboard side when the starboard blisters emerged. At any rate she would have snapped up if there had been watertight integrity set...

ROHMEL: She couldn't have rolled any faster.

FOREMAN: Oh yes she could - with 5 torpedoes in her port side!

LUTENECKER: Who walked it over?

FOREMAN: You can tell we're all experts.....

MORONEY: They forgot to put the plug in.

HOLMQUIST: You people are talkin' about watertight integrity - we went in commission in 1918. We were going overseas and then the battle of Jutland came up. Before that you could stand on the Main deck and see all the damn guns.

FOREMAN: Is that right?

HOLMQUIST: Then after the Battle of Jutland, we learned about W.T. integrity and we put back into Philadelphia...

FOREMAN: Was that when they put the bunks in too? The OKLAHOMA was the first battleship to have bunks...

HOLMQUIST: No, that must have come later.

* * * * *